

Introduction and Background

The *Total Learning Initiative*

The ***Total Learning Initiative*** is designed to address a critical educational challenge in the US: the persistent achievement gap that challenges students from impoverished and historically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Based on research findings in social policy, education, and childhood development, ***Total Learning*** (TL) is a “whole child” approach designed to meet the needs of children age zero to nine and their families living at or below the poverty level. At its core, ***TL***’s orientation is that classroom experiences exist in the context of the child’s entire life. In order for children to learn and mature, so as to close the achievement gap, the full spectrum of needs of impoverished families must be addressed.

The ***Total Learning Initiative*** has been developed by Action for Bridgeport Community Development (ABCD), Bridgeport’s community action agency, in collaboration with the Bridgeport Board of Education, Head Start, Child FIRST, Arts Education IDEAS, Music Together of Fairfield County, and the Michael Cohen Group LLC.

Introduction and Background (cont.)

Total Learning Kindergarten Model

The ***Total Learning*** kindergarten model consists of several educational and social support services:

In the classroom:

- An enhanced learning environment (small class sized, reduced student-to-teacher/paraprofessional classroom ratio, an extended school day).
- Delivery of core curricula via a multi-sensory, multi-modal, arts-infused approach to curriculum delivery.
- Embedded, in-classroom professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals.

Outside the classroom:

- Extensive family services and support.
 - Family workers
 - Child FIRST (intensive home-based, mental health interventions for children at risk and their families)

Introduction and Background (cont.)

Total Learning Preschool Model

The *Total Learning* preschool model consists of educational and social support services:

In the classroom:

- In addition to presentation of core preschool curricula, weekly 45-minute *Music Together* sessions, including a flow of songs, nursery rhymes, vocal and language play, instrumental jam sessions, and movement activities.
- Embedded, in-classroom music education training for preschool teachers.

Outside the classroom:

- Extensive family services and support.
 - Family workers
 - Child FIRST services (intensive home-based, mental health interventions for children at risk and their families)

Introduction and Background (cont.)

Child FIRST Services

In both **Total Learning** models, Child FIRST (Child and Family Interagency Resource, Support and Training) provides health and mental health services as needed by kindergarteners assigned to classrooms receiving all elements of the TL model, and to the preschoolers enrolled in **Total Learning's Music Together** classrooms.

- Child FIRST is a model program to decrease the incidence of serious emotional disturbance, developmental and learning problems, and abuse and neglect among high-risk young children in Greater Bridgeport, Connecticut. When mental health and child development problems first arise, Child FIRST works with pediatricians, teachers, and other community providers to identify, assess, and intervene with vulnerable children and their families.
 - Behavioral health clinicians work within early care and education, pediatric, family resource centers, and other early childhood settings to train and mentor providers to screen and identify early signs of emotional and behavioral problems, and learn strategies to facilitate healthy development.
 - Child FIRST partners to provide consultation services to any community provider and parent concerned about the development of a young child, at the agency site or in the home. •
 - For families with multiple challenges such as depression or domestic violence, Child FIRST provides: comprehensive home-based assessments, the development of an integrated family plan, and care coordination to ensure ongoing access to needed community-based services.
 - Child FIRST provides direct mental health treatment for the child and parents in the home and in community sites.

In the 2007-08 academic year, **Child FIRST provided critical services to 43 children in Total Learning** and their families.

Child FIRST professionals also **assessed 573 preschoolers** enrolled in **Total Learning's Music Together** classrooms.

Introduction and Background (cont.)

Overview of *Total Learning* Evaluation Activities

There are two types of *TL* evaluation activities:

- **Formative evaluation activities.** Ongoing qualitative research to provide continual feedback to inform the development and refinement of key program components.
- **Summative evaluation activities.** Quantitative research (data collection and statistical analyses) to assess the effectiveness of the *Total Learning Initiative*.

Introduction and Background (cont.)

Overview of *Total Learning* Evaluation Activities

Year One (2006-07)

- **Formative research.** Formative evaluation of the professional development component in a pilot kindergarten classroom; formative assessment and refinement of teacher training materials

Year Two (2007-08)

- **Formative research.**
 - Formative evaluation of professional development component in pilot first grade classrooms.
 - Observational and descriptive exploratory case studies of infants/toddlers and their parents enrolled Music Together classes.
- **Summative research.**
 - Summative evaluation of the effectiveness of Total Learning with students in public school kindergarten and preschool classrooms.

Year Three (2008-09)

- **Formative research.** Observational and descriptive research in process:
 - Public school 1st grade pilot classrooms
 - Professional development component in preschool classrooms
 - Music Together infant/toddler and parent classes
- **Summative research.** Effectiveness evaluation underway in:
 - Preschool classrooms
 - Public school kindergarten classrooms